

The Influence of Social Darwinism on Progressive Era Political Thought and Policy

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Introduction

During the Progressive Era, American society was writhing with the growing pains of rapid transformation. Not only had the Industrial Revolution transfigured American society, but also this happened immediately after the United States had succeeded in extracting itself from a long and bloody Civil War. Waves of immigrants were continuing to inundate American cities, largely in search of jobs created by virtue of the Industrial Revolution. Additionally, some rural Americans began to leave their homes in search of better fortunes in the cities. These urban centers strained beneath the weight of a population grown beyond comfortable capacity given the conditions of the time.

These new urban citizens were thrust into a world unknown in the history of civilization. Society had no prior knowledge as to how to cope with the problems of modern development. Many immigrants, unable to even communicate amongst their neighbors, clung to their rural, peasant habits. They understood not at all how to manage the treacherous conditions in which they lived their daily lives. Many “native” Americans could not sufficiently manage the difficulties of urban life either, notwithstanding the lack of a language barrier.

The massive influx of people into the cities resulted in still further complications with which to contend. American cities had never contained such a vast number of inhabitants. As a result, these metropolitan centers were ill equipped to accommodate such an impressive mass of people. Sanitation was underdeveloped and living conditions were overcrowded and dangerous. Cities strained beneath the weight of a population grown beyond the capacities of the old manner of living. Modern sanitation had not yet caught up with the growth of society.

In addition to this, many individuals were working under deplorable conditions for excruciatingly long hours at a rate of pay often insufficient for subsistence. Often these factories not only damaged the health of their workers because they were unsafe. Also, such factories were known to proliferate diseases both among the workers within the factories as well as to the customers who bought their goods. Other industries which did not make use of factories were not much better for the health and wellbeing of their employees and the community in general. These troubles were but a few of the dangers faced by society during the Progressive Era. In light of the myriad problems facing urban populations during the first part of the 20th century, the reasons for Progressive reform become clear.

The radical changes which took place socially were only a part of the remarkable transformation of society during the Progressive Era; the direction of philosophy was also changing radically. Immediately before the onset of the Civil War, Charles Darwin released his *Origin of Species*. Other philosophers had approached evolutionary ideas before Darwin's work was released. However, Darwin's philosophies engaged the population on a large scale and cemented the influence of evolutionary theories in the years to come. The concept of evolution excited the imagination of the scientific community as well as the educated community at large. From evolutionary theory sprung the socially Darwinist ideas that certain individuals were more fit than others. Some would argue that Darwinist tendencies are fundamentally at odds with the underlying spirit of Progressive Era reform. For example, many individuals who subscribed to Darwinian philosophies believed that social welfare reform programs only inhibited the natural development of society. Such programs have their roots in the Progressive Era. By contrast, the individual most responsible for the application of Darwin's theories to society, Herbert Spencer, argued that the weak should not be supported by society at all. If society elects to enact mechanisms for social welfare, Spencer argued, the process of natural selection is only temporarily restrained. Spencer ultimately believed that to hamper the natural evolution of society was to hinder the growth of society at large (Hofstadter, 47: 1944). Individuals subscribing to such belief systems will, for the purposes of this paper, be referred to as the *laissez faire* Social Darwinists. These thinkers believed that the forces of nature and evolution were beyond societal control and, as such, should not be meddled with. Under this point of view society can effectively be described as a collection of individuals, competing for survival. The fit were in these arguments the rich and successful who have "survived" and prospered in industrial life. The least fortunate of individuals should, therefore, not be aided by society. Their station in society has proved their genetic lot. Helping the poor was argued to only stall the progress of society. Another example of an individual who subscribed to such *laissez faire* beliefs was William Graham Sumner.

Darwinist ideas fundamentally changed the way society was perceived and governed. Evolutionary theory was not only applied to living, breathing organisms. These ideas were utilized in the social sciences as well and particularly adeptly in government. However, another view emerged among other more socially focused philosophers. Here, instead of viewing society as a collection of individuals, fighting desperately to be amongst the fit who survive, humanity as

a whole was seen to be evolving. *Society* is effectively evolving. Those subscribing to this view allowed for the possibility that the course of society could be altered by human intervention. Individuals could, in fact, function in much the same way as genetic mutation. Ultimately, the entire course of human society could be changed. Because of this view, these individuals began to advocate policies which were designed to control the conditions under which society evolved. These individuals will be referred to as social control Darwinists. Often their point of view resembled pragmatist philosophy. Some philosophers who are associated with this manner of thought are Lester Ward and, interestingly, influential economic thinkers such as Richard Ely. These individuals, as their political philosophies would indicate, attempted to influence political policy in many ways.

Here we arrive at an interesting paradox. Some individuals were using Darwinian language to argue against governmentally imposed social welfare mechanisms. These philosophers argued that, by giving government aid to the “unfit”, the government would be artificially propping up these individuals. According to this argument, the government would simply be delaying the eventual weeding-out of the “unfit”. Some time later, other philosophers retaliated against this position by arguing that by establishing social welfare measures, society’s progress would be facilitated. Interestingly, still others argued that some social welfare mechanisms would *aid* in the weeding-out of the “unfit”. Therefore, we see a trend beginning to develop as political and economic theory began to be shaped by Darwinian (or generally evolutionary) philosophy. However, what is fascinating is that often these theorists holding seemingly oppositional philosophies at times advocated the same or similar policies. For example, during this time many individuals and organizations began to lobby for a wage floor. Some argued that such a policy would elevate those individuals occupying the lower class. Others argued that the minimum wage would elevate the position of some in society while the least fortunate would be pushed out of the market. Referring to these individuals as “unemployable” (for various reasons based upon genetic inadequacy), it was argued that their removal from the labor market would effectively cleanse society of its least desirable elements. Because of this strange philosophical paradox which became apparent during the Progressive Era, it seems worthwhile to examine how these various forms of Darwinian thought moved and shaped policy during the Progressive Era and going forward.

Influence of Darwinist Philosophy

For the sake of this discussion, social Darwinism will be defined as any of the philosophies which suggested the stratification of society based upon genetically inherited qualities which predisposed some to survive and others to perish. Often, wealth was used as a designating characteristic of the “fit”, but not always. It has often been the case that the use or disuse of wealth in socially Darwinist arguments is predicated on the relative expedience of such arguments to the individuals using the arguments. At times the rich are said to be the obvious fit while in other instances some of the poor are described as worthy while some are not. However, when such ideas can be properly described as Darwinistic, the proponents of the philosophies advanced their position under the premise that society is stratified based upon genetically inheritable traits. Some subscribing to Darwinist philosophy suggested the possibility that the progress of society could be aided by governmental regulation of some aspects of life, while others believed that this could only be a hindrance to its progress. As such, the prognoses of Darwinist philosophies for society can be optimistic or gloomy.

Also, although Darwin is the most prominent evolutionary philosopher, what we now call social Darwinism is often not directly associated with Darwin’s philosophies personally. Many philosophers before Darwin’s *Origin of Species* discussed society in language commonly described as socially Darwinian. For example, Lamarck and Malthus are two philosophers coming before Darwin who used language to describe society which would be now properly called Darwinian. Lamarck’s ideas influenced Herbert Spencer profoundly. He believed that learned qualities could be inherited. Spencer agreed with Lamarck in this respect. Spencer, in turn became one of the most influential evolutionary theorists, applying theories of evolution and natural descent to society. Others, as was the case with those subscribing to eugenic beliefs, argued that learned qualities could not be inherited and therefore the inferior could not be improved. Therefore, the only thing which could be done about those who were “bad” or “unfit” would be to limit their reproduction. By the advent of the Progressive Era, most individuals who believed in some form of evolution believed that society would be bettered and thus, many took a social control stance. In spite of this, much resistance was met by those advocating social control from the *laissez faire* philosophers when it came to labor policy. Interestingly, those who advocated *laissez faire* Darwinism in terms of labor policy sometimes advocated social control Darwinism in regard to other policies such as eugenics. Nonetheless, the point remains that

some believed that humanity's process could be facilitated by society, and others did not. The question of what Darwinism is exactly is admittedly a difficult one and will always be open to criticism.

One particularly important philosophy to understand when discussing the Progressive Era is the philosophy of social control. According to Edward A. Ross, social control describes the ways that "society can mold the individual to the necessities of the group". Such philosophies were used in arguments by those who sought to control the evolution of society and by some who sought to control the evolution and purity of groups within society. During the Progressive Era there was a push for scientific management in government. This meant that government should be run by individuals qualified in the various fields of governance instead of relying on the patronage system to fill governmental positions. Scientific management of society was said to facilitate the progress of society. Those Darwinist leaders of the Progressive Era often assumed the responsibility to decide how to shape society going forward.

One important manifestation of social Darwinism during the Progressive Era was a tendency toward nativist beliefs and restrictionist immigration policy. For the purposes of this paper, nativist philosophies will be interpreted to mean those that favored restrictive immigration practices and extolled the merits of non-immigrant Americans over any recent immigrant class. It is true that, unlike Europe, almost all Americans immigrated or are members of families who immigrated to the United States relatively recently. In spite of this, in the vernacular of the Progressive Era, individuals separated by a few generations from their immigration were often referred to as "native". The arguments used against the recent immigrants were typically based upon racial grounds, implying or often explicitly stating the inherent inferiority of new coming national or ethnic groups based upon Darwinist language of genetic hierarchy. During debates regarding labor legislation, at times arguments for restrictive immigration were the result of the legitimate fear of wage suppression. However, because the new immigrants were increasingly from southern and eastern Europe and, until the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Asia they were perceived to be of a different stock than the "native", Protestant Americans of northern European origin and the restriction or exclusion from entry was often desired.

Here the definition of race becomes important. In nativist discourses, the term race could apply to basically any group of people with any set of distinguishing characteristics. The races of Europe are mentioned variously and are sometimes designated simply by nationality. Many

American theorists assumed that Anglo-Saxon race was the most advanced. Most often, when nativist individuals discussed the “lower races”, these included anyone from Southern or Eastern Europe, (sometimes, also, the Irish and Scottish who were not considered to be as superior genetically as their British counterparts), Asia, and anyone of African descent. By nature of their race, these groups of people were argued to be “unfit”. It was argued that if these “unfit” were already in the country, policy of the United States should not facilitate their procreation. As such, many nativist Progressives were also proponents of eugenic policies. They extolled the virtues of purity of heritage, restrictive immigration practices, and any policy which would limit the numbers of “unfit” allowed to enter or multiply within the United States.

Although Darwinism was an influential philosophical component at this time, of course other strains of thought were also influential. Many prominent individuals of this era could be called Progressive reformers. For the purposes of this paper, Progressives will be those who supported the expansion of government as a means by which to control the conditions of society as opposed to the racial makeup of society itself. These reformers emphasized the collective good and their policies were designed to ameliorate the harsh social and, most often, urban conditions of the early twentieth century. Their philosophies contained Benthamite undertones, often advocating policies designed to create the greatest good for the greatest number of people. However, sprinkled into this largely collective language were republican undertones of civic good and individual responsibility. Some of these individuals also believed in the Socially Darwinist premise of genetic hierarchy and that something should be done to limit the bottom classes or those racially inferior groups. As such, these individuals could well be placed into the category of social control Darwinists.

We can begin to envision the potential use of social control for the Darwinist Progressive. Formerly problematic questions found easy answers in the minds of the individuals who subscribed to these ideologies. For example: should immigration be allowed or disallowed, restrictive or relatively permissive? Of course, fears of increased immigration had existed in America before the Progressive Era – particularly fear of those perceived to be cultural “others”. However, after the advent of socially Darwinian philosophy, an air of scientific legitimacy began to envelop nativist rhetoric and various policies were designed to shield the “native” population from excessive contact with inferior groups. Scientists now claimed to be able to prove the inherent superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the inferiority of virtually everyone else. This

provided a significant amount of cover for those who subscribed to some type of racist (or in, similarly founded arguments, sexist) beliefs. Many of these theories held widespread popular appeal and appeared to be bolstered by the examples of new immigrants living under squalid conditions during this era. This made it easy to make the case that the new immigrants were of an inherently lower genetic quality than “native” Americans. The argument was even advanced that these individuals had an inherently lower cost of living than the more sophisticated Anglo-Saxon (Leonard, 2005: 214). Therefore because these individuals could subsist on less than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, it was said that these groups reduced the standard of living for all workers and pushed the older immigrants or “native” Americans out of their former positions.

The anxiety that immigrants would drive down wages was certainly a legitimate fear. However, drawing the inference that these individuals were genetically capable of subsisting on less was obviously a faulty conclusion to draw. Additionally, by taking the next logical step, one can easily see how eugenic policies may enter the dialogue. If it can be “demonstrated” that the new immigrant groups had a lower standard of living than Anglo Saxons, genetic disabilities possessed by other groups are sure to be demonstrable as well. Therefore, society would benefit from the removal of genetically inferior material.

The debates which were shaped by Social Darwinism during the Progressive Era, for the sake of clarity, will be placed into three categories: labor policy, eugenics and immigration.

Labor Policy

Economists were arguably some of the most influential proponents of policy during the Progressive Era. Biologists proposed the sources of society’s “problems” and economists designed the ways that these problems could be fixed. Economists realized the potential social control mechanisms that were available to them within the field of economic policy and they sought to exploit these instruments as a means of advancing their political goals. Intelligently, these economists understood that the most expedient manner in which to affect change was through organization and advocacy. Therefore they created organizations designed with the goal of shaping policy. Social Darwinists also made their way into various positions of power within the university systems and the government.

One interesting figure, influential in the movement for labor reform at the beginning of the twentieth century is a lesser-known individual by the name of Royal Meeker. Meeker’s

philosophies were well placed for their dispersion. Meeker served as the U.S. Commissioner of Labor under President Woodrow Wilson. A statistician and professor at Princeton University, Meeker believed in compulsory education for all children. Additionally, and arguably more controversially, he argued that children should be subject to compulsory civic service within the public school systems (Meeker, New York Times 1913). The privileged education that the upper classes were given was a cause for concern according to Meeker and, as such, he argued that rich and poor alike should be enrolled in the public education system. In egalitarian tones Meeker declared that private and privileged education should not be allowed (Ibid.).

Another Progressive policy for which Meeker advocated was a minimum wage. However, the professor advocated policies such as a minimum wage based upon their eugenic effects. Based upon his theories, if a wage floor was established, the unfit would be pushed out of the workforce, making room for other “more desirable” members of society. In his words:

It is much better to enact minimum-wage laws, even if it deprives these unfortunates of work. Better that the state should support the inefficient wholly and prevent the multiplication of the breed than subsidize incompetence and unthrift, enabling them to bring forth after their kind (Meeker, 1910: 544).

Meeker supported social control policies suggesting that individuals can mold and be molded by society (in his ideas regarding compulsory education and civic duty). Also, his ideas suggested that some members of society were beyond the reach of this social betterment (in his arguments regarding the eugenic functions of the minimum wage). Once unemployed, the “unemployable” would be more readily discernable and could be isolated and prevented from having children. It was a common belief at the time that those genetically inferior individuals should simply be shut up in institutions.

Another interesting individual active in the debate over Progressive reform was Florence Kelley. Kelley was an economist and a social Progressive active in both local and national efforts for labor reform. She was the secretary of the National Consumers’ League (NCL) and the first woman factory inspector in Chicago (Beinen, 2006). At a time when “freedom of contract” was the rule in the court system, Kelley lobbied for protective regulations such as minimum wage and maximum hour laws on the part of all workers and women in particular. Because the franchise had not yet been extended to women, special considerations were made for women. Constitutionally, voting was the litmus test for full citizenship rights at the time.

Women, failing this test, were considered to be a special dependent class and protections could be extended to them which were not likewise extended to men (Leonard, 2005: 779). However, with Kelley as with other labor reformers this was not the only reason for protecting only women in some labor legislation.

Like Meeker, Kelley made eugenic arguments with regard to the minimum wage. She argued that the unemployment caused by the minimum wage would disproportionately affect women who would be forced out of the labor market and return home to care for their families. This was said to perform the eugenic function of contributing to the stability of families. This would be helpful to society as not all of the lower classes were unfit as indicated by Kelley. Those who were unfit would be more easily discernable once removed from the labor market. It was further argued that women were the rightful matriarch of the family. If they were no longer forced to work outside the home, the wage lowering effect of their participation in the labor market would be removed. It was assumed that if employers were paying the minimum wage, they could not be expected to employ a woman over a man as a man was argued to be more useful in the labor market than a woman. The natural consequence of this, Kelley argued, was that the rightful breadwinner would be restored to his position. Because women would increasingly stay at home to raise children, generations of good Americans would be raised by their rightful matriarchal figure. It was argued that men would be able to provide for their families without financial assistance from their wives which was necessary under conditions of “subnormal” wages. For example, Kelley argued regarding retail stores:

These stores minimize the employment of men, substituting for them women, girls, and boys, employed largely at less than living wages (1911: 305).

It is true that the stores in question paid lower wages to those classes of individuals that they deemed dependent. The presumption here by both the industries employing these individuals and the Progressive reformers is that the income of children and women is strictly supplemental to the family income. However, because industries could obtain labor at subnormal wages, the result was a suppression of the cost of labor market-wide in certain industries. The assumption that women’s incomes were supplemental allowed for the substantially lower payment of women for work equal to men’s. Of course there were, at the time, women who supported themselves and these women still earned less than their male counterparts. However, this was often justified

using the argument that women, as with certain immigrant groups had a lower standard of living than men (Leonard, 2005: 777).

Another Darwinist argument used to support the minimum wage was a moral argument. It was assumed that women were, by nature, morally weaker than men. Kelley further justifies the argument that a wage floor should be established, particularly for women by claiming that women working for low wages were more likely to fall into prostitution without improvements in compensation paid to these women. Kelley argued that the low wages paid in retail stores were closely linked to “the social evil” (or prostitution) in Chicago (Kelley, 1911: 306). Thus, women should comprise a protected class of citizens morally as well as physically and for the good of society in general. Women were said to be too weak to provide for their own moral protection.

Of course, these various political actors did not function within a vacuum of their individual political thought. They all helped to shape the discourses and pushed for the policies which were implemented at the time. Additionally, these individuals’ paths of influence crossed at several points in some of their careers. They advocated for similar policies and were often members of the same organizations.

Many influential, intellectual individuals were members of powerful economic organizations such as the American Economics Society (AES), the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), and the National Consumer’s League (NCL). The first two organizations were chosen because, as previously mentioned, economists had a demonstrable effect on public policy during this era. Naturally, when considering economics in America, the preeminent organization is the AES. This organization gave rise to its sister organization the AALL which sought to affect change in industry through legislative means. Interestingly, the NCL shaped reform in yet another way. Whereas the AALL applied pressure to industries legislatively through regulation, the NCL applied pressure from without by influencing the purchasing decisions that consumers made. Additionally, the NCL sought to cooperate with the industries that they intended to reform, while the AALL focused on reform based legislation which would impose reform on the industries in question (although there was considerable cooperation between the AALL and Diamond Match Company regarding the removal of white phosphorous from the industry). The examination of these organizations reveals both public and private efforts for reform. Another remarkable feature of the NCL was its reputation as

principally a women's organization. Therefore, an interesting cross section of advocacy techniques and individuals can be attained.

What is common across these organizations is that the individuals involved understood that social control was possible through economic control. As such, these organizations were profoundly influential in the push for economic reform measures such as minimum wage and maximum hour laws. Not only did they use the deplorable conditions under which people were living and working as proof that changes needed to be made. Often members of each of these groups argued that some socially inferior groups were pushing down wages in industry and causing Americans' standard of living to decrease. The fear of wage suppression is a common and recurring anxiety regarding immigration debates. However, during the Progressive Era, a theory of government and sociology was in place that facilitated the use of techniques for the suppression of and the removal of "undesirable" groups within the workforce. The groups in question were new immigrants, at this time from Southern and Eastern Europe, Jews (although, at the time many American Jews organized to combat rising anti-Semitism and nativism) (Zolberg, 2008: 222-230), Asians, women, the epileptic, feeble-minded and immoral.

Rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority had been common for a number of years. It was certainly not new to the Progressive Era. However, in the years immediately before the Progressive Era, socially Darwinist theories seemingly supported the possibility of a racial or genetic hierarchy already imagined to exist. As a result of this, scientists felt justified in advocating and politicians were persuaded to endorse policies designed to eliminate certain classes of individuals from the gene pool or at least minimize their presence in American society. For example, In 1907 Indiana established its first compulsory sterilization law

Beliefs regarding the inherent inferiority of certain groups were not always applied to legislation as transparent as the compulsory sterilization laws. As previously mentioned, another area in which economists made socially Darwinist arguments was regarding labor reform. Leonard, in his article published in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* describes a shift in theory regarding the rate of wages. He explains that during the Progressive Era, wages were increasingly believed to be determined by an individual's standard of living instead of the productivity of the worker as had most often been assumed to be the primary determinant in the past (Leonard, 2005: 214). To establish a minimum wage, it is reasonable to say that a standard of living had to be determined. Additionally, it is reasonable to assert that a certain standard of

living should be maintained by American citizens, below which individuals should not fall. However this belief was relatively controversial at the time. Remember that some social Darwinists believed that no one should be assisted by the government. The other economists who believed that labor reform would perform eugenic functions used arguments rooted in the supposedly proven biological and genetic inferiority of these groups. One economist argued in *The American Economic Review* that a difficulty in establishing a minimum wage is the result of instances when:

...workpeople with distinctly different standards of living come into contact with one another in industries where the legal minimum wage is to be applied (Holcombe, 1912: 34).

He continues to say:

There are several standards of living among the industrial population of the United States, and in consequence a tendency toward an occupational division of labor between different races (Ibid.).

Holcombe, the author, was a member of the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Board and a Harvard University scholar (Ibid.). In this discourse Holcombe discusses as an example Australia's minimum wage policy. He specifically points to the Chinese in relation to the "white Australian" to demonstrate the different standards of living amongst races.

This manner of thinking was not uncommon amid economists. John R. Commons and John B. Andrews wrote a book entitled *Principles of Labor Legislation* in which they claimed that some immigrants of Southern or Eastern European origins could theoretically, in the future be Americanized. However, they argued that "Orientals" could not assimilate because of their exaggerated tendency toward thrift. This tendency, they argued, drove down the wages in certain industries (Andrews and Commons, 1916: 74). Commons was an economist from the University of Wisconsin and a President of the AEA and Andrews, a student of Commons', was the secretary and later the president of the AALL.

Interestingly, these individuals, in the same discourse on labor legislation, argued that a minimum wage was the simplest way to even the playing field between employer and employee. Such seemingly egalitarian discussion is further validated by ascriptive language characteristic of much Progressive Era discourse regarding labor legislation. Often these individuals were, genuinely interested in reform. However, they were often operating under assumptions

regarding the inherent inferiority of many groups of individuals based upon flawed theories of genetic hierarchy. They believed that these theories were scientifically proven and, by extension, were actionable. Their primary interest was protecting the interests of “native” Americans against the suppression brought about by steady immigration and the use of child labor. The obviously legitimate goal of protecting the American workforce from unnecessary wage suppression was validated using ideas of genetic superiority aimed at the elimination of particular classes of citizens. Such language was a useful tool used to motivate lawmakers to action.

Interestingly although many today argue that raising the rate of pay or instituting a minimum wage does not result in a significant increase in unemployment, the assumption that a minimum wage does not reduce employment was not a feature of Progressive Era philosophy. It was argued that individuals would lose jobs. However, these individuals were argued to be unemployable for various reasons. Therefore, by removing them from the labor market both employers and employees would be benefited. Others lived below the American standard of living because of genetic predisposition and should not be allowed to suppress the wages for “native” citizens.

The influence of American organizations and the economists that inhabited them found its way to the pinnacle of American political power. The president worried about race suicide and the House of Representatives employed a eugenics expert for matters of Immigration and Naturalization. What was somewhat unprecedented about the Progressive Era was the amount of credibility attached to the testimony of “scientific” experts. Because scientific management became a desired trait in government, those individuals who justified their information as statistically sound were granted particular attention. This was the case even if the statistics they used were of questionable character or were otherwise unreliable.

One organization which was highly influential during the Progressive Era was the American Economic Association (AEA). The AEA was founded years before the Progressive Era began. Yet, this organization maintains its prominence in the field of economics to this very day. The individuals who originally founded the organization stated in their Statement of Purpose that the AEA:

...believe(s) in a progressive development of economic conditions, which must be met by a corresponding development in legislative policy (Quoted by Richard Ely, 1910: 49).

Based upon the organizations self-description, it is not shocking that the AEA sought to influence matters of labor policy.

Reform was a foundational objective of the AEA when it was first organized. Because the AEA wished to remain principally an organization dedicated to the academic pursuit of economics, those involved with the AEA created a sister organization specifically designed to influence labor legislation: The American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) (Ely, 1908: 124). In 1907, at the inception of the AALL it was composed almost exclusively of members of the AEA (Ibid.). However, whereas the AEA was organized for the furtherance of the academic discipline of economics, the AALL was constituted for the sole purpose of labor legislation.

The AALL sought to educate the public on the necessity of labor legislation as a means by which to mitigate the hazards of industrial work by publishing information both in their *American Labor Legislation Review* and in other, unaffiliated publications. They operated under the mantra that it was proper for the government to regulate health and safety conditions in industry. Thus, they lobbied extensively at both the state and federal level for labor legislation protective of the individual worker. In addition to this work, they actively drafted standard bills which could be used in state laws in the stead of original legislation by any individual state legislature. The theme of their campaign was built around the idea of social control and scientific management. They believed that scientific processes should be employed for the creation of legislation and they mounted an impressive informational campaign to demonstrate the necessity of governmental regulation in matters involving industry (Pierce, 1953: 59).

The AALL was influential in the movement to remove harmful substances from the manufacturing industries. They organized a massive crusade to influence Congress to prohibit the use of a poisonous phosphorous in the match producing industry which caused the condition called “phossy jaw” or phosphorous necrosis. The campaign was successful and President Taft signed a bill which introduced a tax sufficient to make the use of the poisonous phosphorous obsolete on April 9, 1912 (Pierce, 1953: 78). Additionally, the AALL lobbied for regulation in many aspects of industry hazardous to the health of workers and their model legislation was passed in many states. Another example of a considerable victory in many states was regarding the use of silica and its detrimental side effects on workers. Because it was expensive for these organizations to institute the changes, few companies would introduce measures voluntarily.

Therefore the AALL worked to make workmen's compensation laws applicable to silica poisoning and industrial disease generally. Before, workmen's compensation laws were only applicable to industrial injury resulting from accidents. Thus, the organization sought to make all industrial disease compensable under workman's compensation. The application of workmen's compensation to industrial diseases rendered the continuation of antiquated working conditions in which the employee was unprotected from the hazards of occupational health problems economically impractical to businesses forced to compensate workers as if they had been in an industrial accident (Pierce, 1953, 89-90).

It was obvious that most of the regulations inspired by the AALL were necessary for the protection of the worker against hazardous working conditions. Often the individuals harmed had little redress against such massive industries in the likely event that their health was damaged occupationally. The corporations to which such regulations applied could have hardly been expected to institute the changes individually because the more socially conscious companies understood that other corporations perhaps were not as concerned with the wellbeing of their employees as they were about their bottom line. Some companies would claim that there was no way to link their industrial process to the disease of the worker. Additionally, the AALL recognized that had the regulations not been applicable industry wide or at least state wide, the burden upon the companies to institute health and safety standards would have been prohibitive to their competitive position in the industry.

The AALL was populated by many economic heavyweights. As previously mentioned, prominent members of the AEA founded the AALL. John B. Andrews was the secretary of the AALL. He was a student of John Commons who was a professor of political economy and sociology at the University of Wisconsin. Many individuals very active within the Progressive Movement came out of Wisconsin in general and the University in particular. The University of Wisconsin housed many prominent Progressive figures in the movement for Progressive Era reform measures. Richard T. Ely, one time president of the AEA, was a member of the University of Wisconsin faculty. He was a member of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, the Wisconsin Minimum Wage Board, among other positions (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2009).

One cannot help but notice the stark discrepancy that is demonstrable in Commons belief system regarding justice in industrial matters as opposed to his beliefs concerning racial issues.

Commons was among those who believed that competition disproportionately favored the less fit. Subscribing to a similar philosophy as those individuals who believed in race suicide which will be discussed later, Commons believed that the Anglo-Saxon race was not cut out for urban life. Because of this, they failed to thrive in this environment and were susceptible to the possibility of being overtaken by the “lower races”. In a vein similar to other theorists, he argued that different races of individuals had different standards of living and that *the race with the lowest necessities displaces others* (quoted in Leonard, 2005: 215). In fact, his works entitled *Races and Immigrants* and *Race and Democracy* dealt with racial issues in depth, revealing Commons’ ideas of the different races.

Another leading group organized to affect change at a grassroots level as opposed to the institutional manner that the AALL pursued changes. The NCL recognized astutely that all individuals in modern society are consumers and, as such, exercise a great deal of financial control over the industries from which they purchase. However, being unorganized, the consumer has had no way to recognize or combat the myriad problems that they faced as well as the social problems that industrial society faced. Because of this, the National Consumers League was established. The innovative intellectuals, who recognized the forgoing, set forth a list of aims which described, basically, their mission statement and the hazards which the individual consumer faced during the Progressive Era that they wished to combat. In this statement, written by Florence Kelley, the organization complains of adulterated foods, the “sweated trades”, the subnormal wages coupled with long hours for often seasonal work followed by long periods of unemployment. Kelley argues that:

All factory legislation is enacted in recognition of the fact that the human relations of supply and demand are susceptible of beneficent modifications...the Consumer’s League, latest comer in this field, aims at still another recognition of this truth (1899: 295).

She argues that lack of uniformity in factory laws allows states with the most lax laws regarding factory legislation to benefit the most. Kelley sets forth Massachusetts as an example of a state that has “the best labor code in the country”. However, because the national government has authority over interstate commerce, the states cannot stop the importation of goods into their state which fall below the manufacturing standards of their state. Therefore, according to their argument, the consumer in Massachusetts is not much more protected from permissive labor

standards than any other consumer in the country. Consumers must, therefore, organize and use their collective power to influence business. She states this idea as such:

The National Consumers' League operates under the proposition that, to constitute an effective demand for goods made under right conditions, there must be numbers of consumers sufficiently large to assure purchases steady and considerable enough to compensate for the expense incurred by the humane employer (Ibid.).

The League hoped that, through collective effort, national labor standards could be enacted including a minimum wage and healthy working conditions.

The influence of this organization, at its inception is remarkable and, among other reasons, due largely to the preeminence of its membership and the recognition that like organizations had received at the state level. The League's *Aims* would be read at a meeting of the American Economic Association and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Additionally, the League solicited support from the country's leading universities such as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, The University of Pennsylvania, Wellesley College and the University of Chicago (Bixby et. al, 1911: 1-2).

The organization researched conditions under which products were produced and employees labored. After publishing their findings, they asked the exceptionally good employers to display the NCL tag. They sought to support companies that rose to a high standard and to encourage others to follow this example. Additionally, state Consumers' Leagues could join if they accepted the standards of the National Consumers' League. Although this state membership was elective, in the *Aims and Principles* Kelley concedes that the effectiveness of the organization depends on these smaller organizations (Kelley, 1911: 303).

The NCL appealed to the conscience of the consumer regarding the conditions under which a product purchased was made. Additionally, the organization sought to impress upon employers the importance of a respectful and decent relationship between themselves and their employees. They sought to support such excellent employers who were constantly under competitive pressure from their peers to lower their standards. Not only did the NCL begin a grassroots campaign for better working conditions and sound products, the organization also attempted to influence national and state legislation to protect consumers and employees.

The NCL was founded upon sound principles by academic individuals who sought to ameliorate the conditions under which individuals worked. Additionally, the organization sought

to inform consumers regarding their purchases and to protect the consumer against contaminated goods. However in spite of the sound principles of the NCL many other premises advanced by the members of this organization were questionable.

The first president of the NCL was John Graham Brooks. Brooks graduated from the Harvard Divinity School and became a Unitarian minister. He also served as a lecturer at Harvard on the subject of socialism. When discussing the meaning behind the NCL label Brooks stated with regard to the placement of the label on cigar boxes:

It was...against the competition of lower class, unorganized labor that this weapon of the label was first directed. Its appeal was to the smoker: "Buy no cigars except from the box marked with the trade union label. Thus you help to maintain the white standard as against the cooly standard of life (Brooks, 1900: 251)."

In this instance, Brooks is discussing the cigar industry union's choice to employ the NCL white label. Here he implies that the implicit message sent to the consumer was that the cigars bought bearing the NCL label were produced by white union workers. Again, Brooks assumes in his argument that other ethnic groups somehow have a different standard of living than "native" or white Americans. Further, he goes on to list a number of unions that have chosen to use the label for similar reasons (Ibid.). Here, Brooks argues that instead of using governmental social control mechanisms to influence the cigar industry, collective action was taken. Although not strictly *laissez faire* Darwinism, market mechanisms were used from within a particular industry to apply pressure to those companies using Chinese labor for the production of their cigars.

These organizations actively lobbied Congress and various state legislatures for the passage of legislation. Often the legislatures of the various states responded and, at times, Congress did as well. Various new factory laws were enacted to protect workers at the state and national level.

Such regulations were passed only after a great deal of resistance from the *laissez faire* social Darwinists. Because they believed that the government should not interfere in the private sector, most of the influence of the *laissez faire* Darwinists was not through direct political action. Such philosophers opposed labor regulation primarily from within the judicial system. During the Progressive Era, the Supreme Court allowed few regulations on private business under the auspices of freedom of contract. Competition was the supreme law to these individuals and they argued that no Constitutional provision allowed the federal government to regulate business.

However, these individuals were not nearly as opposed to governmental regulation of the “unfit” as they were of governmental regulation of business.

Eugenics

Another manifestation of Darwinism during the Progressive Era was the eugenics movement. Interestingly, eugenic policies were often portrayed as being benevolent and just protections of the American worker. Limited immigration allowed the “native” worker to compete in the workforce without the influence of those individuals who pushed down the working wage (by being biologically able to subsist on less). Those who believed in the value of social control economic theories were supported by the more extreme, eugenic belief that, certain groups or individuals were mentally, physically, or morally defective as a result of genetic predisposition. Such beliefs were not strictly confined to immigrant groups. Poor whites were also at times accused of being “imbeciles” or feeble minded, as was the case of Carrie Buck.

Carrie Buck was shut up in an asylum for the epileptic and the feeble-minded because she had given birth to an illegitimate child. Because of the child’s illegitimacy, it was also suggested that Buck was immoral. It was asserted that all of the flaws in Buck’s character were due to genetic inadequacy. Virginia’s compulsory sterilization law permitted the state to involuntarily sterilize individuals and the state chose Buck as its first application of this law. She resisted and the case was taken to the Supreme Court. In spite of the fact that her pregnancy was the result of a rape (although it is unclear whether or not this fact was presented in the case) and although most of the individuals testifying against Carrie Buck had never met her, the Court upheld Virginia statute (Quinn, 2008). In the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, social Darwinist and Supreme Court Justice:

It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough (Holmes, 1927).

Holmes adamantly believed that the government should not attempt to ameliorate any individual’s position in society and often expressed disgust at governmental policies attempting to do so. However, because he believed in the propriety of judicial deference to the legislature

and the will of the majority, his judicial writings often sought to uphold laws with which he personally disagreed (Rosen, 2006: 108-109).

Although the decision excerpted above was written for a case before the Court after what most scholars classify as the Progressive Era proper, the law involved is a compulsory sterilization law of the Progressive Era. The case also involves an example of an individual who typically espoused *laissez faire* Darwinist ideas upholding a dramatic example of social control philosophy. The premise behind the remarks made in the decision indicate that those who unfortunately populated the ranks of the “unfit” should have never been brought into the world. Because of this, it was a social service to insure that these individuals were not allowed to continue the procreation of “their kind”. If they were allowed to do so, they would only be a social and economic drain on the resources of society.

Social control theories suggest that something should be done about the presence of “undesirable” individuals in society. This allowed for the possibility that these individuals should be barred from reproducing or that conditions should be created which would have the effect of making it more difficult for these individuals to reproduce or enter the country in the first place.

Fears of racial others were further cultivated when individuals made the case for nativist restrictions or eugenic practices based upon theories of “race suicide”. Because these scientists suggested that they had noticed a tendency of the “higher races” procreating at a much lower rate than the “lower races”, they took Darwin’s idea of survival of the fittest and inverted it. Instead of the fittest out-surviving the unfit, the unfit out-reproduced the fit at such a rate that the “higher races” would slowly begin to disappear. This was said to be a result of improved conditions in society in terms of sanitation. In fact, race suicide was thought to be such a problem that President Theodore Roosevelt was very concerned about its effects on American society (Roosevelt: 1907: 550 – 551).

Theodore Roosevelt believed so strongly in the social consequences of “race suicide” as to call those upper class individuals who do not have enough children to replace the race “criminals” (1907: 551). In an open letter in the *Review of Reviews* Roosevelt openly scolded the magazine for publishing an article by Dr. Cronin on *The Doctor in the Public Schools* which implied that race suicide was not a problem. Roosevelt argues that it was pardonable for most members of the general population to have such mistaken beliefs but:

...the man who affects to instruct others of matters of moral and hygienic reform must be expected to show at least the most rudimentary intelligence and morality necessary to prevent his saying what has been said here (1907: 550).

He describes the conditions under which the “most fit” fail to replace their population.

Ultimately, according to this theory, the “most fit” are replaced by the “unfit”. In his words:

The greatest problem of civilization is to be found in the fact that the well-to-do families tend to die out; there results, in consequence, a tendency to the elimination instead of the survival of the fittest (Ibid.).

Not only was this rhetoric aristocratic, but also it points to the belief that individuals of lower classes are somehow of a lower genetic quality than the higher classes. According to this theory, in spite of their inferiority, the “unfit” are by nature more prolific than their upper class counterparts. The improved conditions of society had secured the survival of a greater portion of the “unfit”. At the time it was not perceived that the lower classes were most likely of a more coarse nature because of their limited opportunity, education and experience. Based upon Roosevelt’s descriptions of the poor classes, it can be assumed that a hereditary caste system was to be maintained based upon the idea of the “fittest”. Hereditary transference of status is only natural under this line of reasoning. The upper classes could be self-perpetuating precisely because they had proven themselves to be most fit. However, this was not the case if they refused to perform their civic duty and procreate! These individuals, because of their class association arguably make progenic choices for spouses and produce the most desirable offspring and future citizens. Additionally, if they procreate at a rate advisable according to Roosevelt, they can perpetuate the classes “proven” to be “most fit” (by virtue of their place in society). By extension, we can assume that these individuals were believed to be those “most fit” to govern as well. The fear, thus, becomes the deterioration and ultimately the slow disappearance of the (presumably Anglo-Saxon) race.

The inversion of Darwinian belief of survival of the fit is interesting here. Leonard suggests that the idea of race suicide can possibly be contributed to Edward Ross, an economist and one time president of the American Economic Association (2005: 209). Personified as the immigrant, the lower class was said to be over taking the upper class in terms of population. The upper class (or native population) slowly extinguishes itself (Ibid.).

Also, the remarks of President Theodore Roosevelt above make obvious the prevalence of socially Darwinistic philosophy. The *American Monthly Review of Reviews* was widely read by upper middle class citizens or those individuals that Roosevelt imagined should be more prolific for the maintenance of American society. Another particularly interesting feature of this open letter is the paternalistic, chastening tone the President takes with the author of the article that Roosevelt is criticizing. Within the criticism of the article is the implicit criticism of the reader. Remember, those members of the upper classes (who comprised the readership of the magazine) who fail to have enough children are, in the President's own words, criminal in their negligence of the race. Roosevelt was taught to believe that racial factors conditioned individuals and their political tendencies by John W. Burgess of Columbia University's Law School (Zolberg, 2008: 214).

So prevalent were these ideas that 28 states adopted compulsory sterilization laws to insure that the "unfit" would not procreate. The men behind such legislation were often men of science. Among these was H. H. Laughlin who obtained his doctoral degree from Princeton. He subsequently worked as the superintendent of the Eugenics Records Office of the Department of Genetics of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, D.C. Additionally, Laughlin was influential at the Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Springs Harbor, New York. The sterilization laws referenced above were based upon his model (Quinn, 2008). Laughlin was demonstrably influential in governmental policies because of his impact on these various state laws. Also, he served as the eugenics expert of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization for the United States House of Representatives (Ibid.). (That the United States House of Representatives *had* a eugenics expert for the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization is a shocking idea to ponder.)

Such beliefs were by no means isolated. On the contrary, they were widespread and respected at the time. What is interesting is that the policies which they advocated were often supported by individuals of seemingly different political stripes also.

Another interesting individual to examine is Henry Farnam. Co-founder of the AALL and president of the AEA in 1911, his ideas were naturally believed to be reputable and of some import on the subject of labor legislation and industry regulation. His arguments regarding racial issues were similar to John Commons'. He argues in his work *The State and the Poor* that the advancements that were, at the time, being constantly made in the sanitary condition of the

cities worked to oppose the natural weeding out of the “less thrifty” classes. He goes further to say that:

Every effort that is being made to remove what Malthus called the “positive checks” to population without at the same time increasing the preventive checks, must result in an increase in the very classes which are least able to take care of themselves, and render the more imperative the solution of that exceedingly difficult problem which Mr. Arnold White calls “the sterilization of the unfit.” (1888: 295)

Farnam goes on to discuss the topic in Darwinian terms, arguing that weeds are likely to overrun a garden while the more desirable plants suffer and that *the unintellectual crustaceans still exist in great numbers side by side with the more highly endowed mammals* (Ibid.). Essentially, natural selection would have worked, had technology and sanitation not improved so dramatically. Those “unfit” who would have died naturally from some form of disease would have been selected out of gene pool. Therefore the state should aid in the selection of these individuals and their “sterilization” should be secured. This is another example of a suggested use of social control by Progressive thinkers. However, it seems that these policies are suggested as last ditch efforts when nature fails to control itself. It could be argued that the sterilization laws were the emergency exit for those *laissez faire* social Darwinists. However, such philosophies were advocated by *laissez faire* and social control Darwinists alike.

Dichotomously, the organization to which Mr. Farnam belonged was founded upon truly munificent goals of improving the lot of workers in terms of health, safety and security was occupied by individuals who believed that much, though not all, of the lower class was inherently inferior to the upper classes. Within these arguments were often implicit assumptions that the lower classes were racial “others”. These reformers, while at the same time attempting to uplift the lower classes of society professed the innate weakness of many members of the lower classes on the basis of class and racial associations using social Darwinist rhetoric. It was argued that these individuals were a major part of the problem which would be fixed by labor legislation such as minimum wage and maximum hour laws. Whether or not any given theorist advocated such labor policies, many found eugenic philosophies to be appealing. Some argued at once that industry was oppressing workers and causing hazard to the health and safety of employees while at the same time advocating for the involuntary sterilization for masses of

individuals. As Frank Taussig, president of the AEA from 1904-1905 and honorary vice president of the NCL stated:

We have not yet reached the stage where we can proceed to chloroform them (the unfit) once and for all, but at least they can be segregated, shut up in refuges and asylums, and prevented from propagating their kind (Taussig, 1922: 332 - 333).

Interestingly, he talks in the same chapter about the factory owner as:

...a prosperous and unscrupulous person who takes advantage of the helplessness of the sweated and grinds them to long hours and pitiful wages (Taussig, 1922: 331).

There seems to be a disconnect between the two passages which are separated by a mere page of text. However, Taussig simply assumes that there are some who are employable among the lowest stratum of labor and others who are not. The “others” would be “segregated, shut up in refuges and asylums, and prevented from propagating their kind” while the position of the employable poor would be improved.

Many Progressive economists, like Taussig sought to control various industries through the tax structure, inducing them financially to adopt measures that they would not have otherwise adopted. For example, the bill prohibiting the use of poisonous phosphorous prohibited the importation and exportation of white (the poisonous variety) phosphorous and implemented a tax scale for manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers of these matches (Pierce, 1953: 66-67). The use of the tax structure was a brilliant application of social control. Here it was used for the benefit of workers generally. However, when philosophies such as these were applied to other areas of the law, the resulting policies were not nearly as benign.

Immigration

The common belief of the inherent superiority of certain groups led many of these theorists to favor immigration restriction. Many upper class individuals favored restriction because they feared the deterioration of the American culture and others favored restriction to protect American labor. Economist John R. Commons argued in his Races and Democracy that Jefferson’s words in the Declaration of Independence should not be taken too seriously that “...all men are created equal”. He argued that because the men who wrote and approved the Declaration of Independence were not writing a treatise on human nature, their opinions cannot be construed to dictate immigration policy. As such, he asserted that it was deleterious to the

American system of government to allow those not suited to democracy into the nation. He refers favorably to the Russians who repel:

...those whom he cannot or will not assimilate (Commons, 1903: 38).

Those who are allowed in should be Americanized using the unofficial (but widely acknowledged as official) English language as a tool. His doubt as to the assimilability of the various races within the borders of the United States is, however, palpable in his article. He argues that many of the traits of the “lower races” have become ingrained within any member of each group’s very nature. Regarding Catholic immigrants Commons argues:

Thus it is the peasants of Catholic Europe, who constitute the bulk of our immigration of the past thirty years, have become almost a distinct race, drained of those superior qualities which are the foundation of democratic institutions. If in America our boasted freedom from the evils of social classes fails to be vindicated in the future, the reason will be found in the immigration of races and classes incompetent to share our democratic institutions (Commons, 1903: 37).

He argues that such assimilation has taken many years throughout the course of history in other civilizations. Therefore, if such immigrants are even assimilable, it will take many years. Even then, their assimilability is doubtful.

Another economist who served as president of the AEA, Francis Amasa Walker, actively argued against permissive immigration policies. As a major proponent of protectionist immigration policy, Walker argued that the immigrant was lowering the standard of living for the American worker. Additionally, he stated that these immigrants contributed to the degradation of American society so dramatically that “native” Americans no longer wished to bring children into the world. The American people, thus repulsed by the immigrant, Walker maintained willfully contributed to their own decline rather than bring sons and daughters into competition with a lower class of individuals. Walker claimed that this was reason enough to dramatically reduce immigration into the United States (Walker, 1896). This is yet another example of the ways in which theories of “race suicide” entered the debate regarding public policy in the United States as espoused by an influential member of the economics community.

Such ideas were based upon a twofold evolutionary theory. First, it was believed that science had proven that certain races were superior to others. Second, because the foregoing can be recognized, it was argued, society could be expected to evolve beyond the “archaic” notions

of equality for all mankind. In effect, science had settled the troublesome issue of equality (Smith, 1997: 417). Therefore, the arguments between *laissez faire* Darwinism and social control Darwinism could be effectively settled by dramatically reducing the flow of immigration into the country. What to do with undesirable immigrants became a moot point if such individuals were simply not allowed to enter the country. Labor argued for restriction to protect their workforce and others feared the change in genetic makeup of the country. Both groups found restriction to be favorable for different reasons. Whether or not they agreed about whether it was proper for the government to intervene in private enterprise, most agreed that it was in the nation's best interest to only allow those of "favorable" genetic makeup to enter the country.

Many provisions were discussed in Congress to allow only the most favorable immigrants into the country. Among these were a literacy test and measures of remote control. Some proposed that those steamer companies which ferried immigrants across the ocean should be responsible for their return fare, should the immigrants be found to be unsuitable. A 1907 law attempted to institute measures of remote control which allowed the president to:

...send special commissioners to any foreign country for the purpose of regulating by international agreement...the immigration of aliens to the United States (Quoted in Zolberg, 2008: 230).

Further the law allowed a provision for:

...providing for the mental, moral, and physical examination of such aliens by American consuls or other officials of the United States government at the port of embarkation (Ibid.).

In the first decade of the twentieth century a new processing station was built at Ellis Island where immigrants first stepped ashore in America. These immigrants were:

...subjected to unprecedented moral and physical scrutiny (Zolberg, 2008: 228).

The effects of McKinley's assassination on the collective psyche in 1901 should not be underestimated. A widespread perception of the possibility of subversion from abroad lingered throughout the Progressive Era as assassin Leon Czolgosz was a self-avowed anarchist (Ibid.). This only lent credence to the charge that certain foreign individuals were more genetically predisposed to be morally corrupt.

The situation was further confounded by the recent acquisition of many island nations by the United States in the Spanish-American War. Many of those individuals which lived on the

island nations were of a genetic makeup considered to be inferior to that of “native” Americans. Smith argues that the United States dealt with this situation by creating an immigration hierarchy characterized as such:

...first, the excluded status of people denied entry to and subject to expulsion from the U.S., generally owing to their ethnic or ideological traits; second, colonial subjectship, reserved chiefly for territorial inhabitants declared racially ineligible for citizenship; third, second-class citizenship, usually understood as required by improvident grants of formal citizenship to races not capable of exercising it, and as the proper status for women; and fourth, full citizenship, including voting rights (Smith, 1997: 429).

Smith argues that the various groups of people whose territory the United States acquired after the Spanish-American War fit well into these four categories. He suggests that the Pilipinos were subject to exclusion, or the first category. Those residents of Guam fit the second category and should become permanent subjects but not citizens. The Puerto Ricans were suitable for “second-class citizenship” but not first. Finally, the Hawaiians were assimilable enough and had “enough nonaboriginal people” to eventually become full citizens of the United States (1997: 429-430).

Congress responded to the problem of wage suppression and fear of ethnic “others” by passing immigration restriction acts, most notably the Immigration Act of 1924. Although some lawmakers claimed that race had nothing to do with the new restrictions, “experts” (in eugenics) such as H. H. Laughlin, the author and advocate of many compulsory sterilization laws, contributed to the position that immigration restrictions needed to be tightened. Zolberg asserts that the restrictions in the law served to:

...deal with nonwhite races by way of exclusion and with undesirable European nationalities by restriction (2008: 261).

Further, the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 were passed which were specifically designed to target Asian immigrants who wished to purchase land (Zolberg, 2008: 231). Zolberg also asserts that the Red Scare contributed to the fear of new immigrant groups in addition to pressure from various ethnic and religious groups already in the country. They argued that as the new immigrants’ presence had a detrimental effect on their station in society.

Therefore, immigration restriction can be argued to be a politically expedient answer to many socially Darwinistic charges. Many of the charges made against the “morally defective or

feeble-minded” were implicitly directed against new immigrant groups. The problem of *laissez faire* versus social control Darwinism found its answer in immigration restriction. If very few “unfavorable” individuals are allowed into the country, the problem of how they are to be weeded loses expediency. Of course, there remained many individuals within the country who were believed to be genetically inferior. However, the reduction in the number of those individuals allowed to enter which were widely believed to be inferior was a way to deal with these inferiors before they entered the country.

Interestingly, although the Progressive Party’s platform in 1912 stated that *(t)he supreme duty of the nation is conservation of human resources*, many leading Progressives saw no contradiction between the “conservation of human resources” and the Darwinist and sometimes eugenic policies that many of these individuals advocated. In fact, many of those proponents of eugenic policies believed that the use of eugenics conserved human resources at what was perceived to be a most important level: the race. The quest for “scientific” solutions and “management” of the country’s problems lead to the invention of policies based upon false scientific information. The philosophies of social Darwinism were pervasive and they helped to justify various, wide reaching public policies during the Progressive Era.

Conclusion and Implications

Before the advent of Darwin’s evolutionary theories, States always had to strike some balance between the needs of society in general and individual rights. Some states chose to focus more on collective considerations while the United States’ system of government often weighed heavily on the side of individualism. However, the theory of descent and those subsequent theories inspired by evolutionary ideas cast society in a completely different light. Thus, society would and should eventually be rid of its least valuable members while its more desirable members thrived. The unfit only detracted from the quality of life of the fit and posed an undue burden on society. This burden was placed squarely on the shoulders of the most valuable members of the community.

Soon intellectuals began to apply evolutionary theories to society in general. They began to consider how the unfit members of society should more efficiently be weeded out. Those who rejected the idea that society would always and inevitably be improving itself along predetermined lines sought to improve society. They sought to tweak and tinker with economic

and social policy for the betterment of society as a whole. Policies were proposed which would result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. At the same time, many intellectuals began to advocate social control measures. Individuals could be molded into whatever form society chose and individuals could, in turn, mold society. Additionally, an expanded role for government was beginning to be accepted by a large number of people. It was said that expanded government was the only way to deal with modern industrial society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many citizens, appalled by the conditions of society, called out for governmental regulation of the atrocious conditions around them. The door was open for an expanded government.

Additionally, the premise had been granted that some individuals were more valuable than others and, more importantly, that something should be done about this. After all, these sad truths about humanity were now scientifically “proven”. Many believed their suspicions confirmed. There were a number of socially, biologically, and genetically inferior races. If anything were to be done for the preservation of society, it does not take much of a logical leap to perceive who would be the judge of biological fitness. Individual citizens could not and should not be expected to make arbitrarily make decisions regarding other members of society’s fitness. Therefore, the idea that the government is the proper arbiter of biological fitness manifests itself. Other policies, such as the minimum wage, allowed for the possibility that certain groups would be selected out of competition by labor forces. However, the premise that these individuals should be removed from the market and perhaps from society at large by governmental regulation of business remained.

Because of the widespread acceptance of Darwinist theories, President Roosevelt felt it appropriate to discretely chastise some members of American public for their refusal to have enough children and also to chastise an academic for implying that race suicide was not a problem. Because the government could assume the responsibility to choose who was biologically fit and who was not, the president felt it perfectly reasonable to determine which groups of individuals should procreate and which should not. A perverted version of the meritocracy had become manifest. Ultimately, and as the most extreme example, the compulsory sterilization laws were the result of the explicit acceptance of the government’s role within very intimate aspects of the lives of its citizens in the name of science and with the alleged support of statistical evidence. Many state governments assumed the responsibility of

making very personal choices for their citizens, such as whether or not each citizen should be allowed to have children. The widespread acceptance of such an expanded interpretation of the role of government is further demonstrated by the Supreme Court decision upholding Virginia's compulsory sterilization law.

After a time the theories of eugenics fell into disrepute after the techniques of the Nazis had been exposed. However, the consequences of the immigration laws passed immediately after the close of the Progressive Era are still obvious today. Smith's assertion of the various classes that the various countries fit into seems appropriate. The Philippines were given their freedom in 1946 as they were unsuited to the American way of life (Smith, 1997: 430). Guam and Puerto Rico are still mere territories of the United States and Hawaii has become a state (based upon Smith's assertions, Hawaii was the only territory whose inhabitants seemed eligible for full citizenship).

Although the examples of restriction of immigration are much more legitimate uses of governmental power than other Darwinist policies, the immigration laws passed in the 1920's were geared toward restriction of most immigration and exclusion of others based upon racial grounds. These laws were predicated on the false premise of genetic hierarchy. Again, this was a victory for labor and for those concerned about cultural deterioration. Racial quotas remained in effect for a number of years. In fact, the Chinese Exclusion Act was not repealed until 1943 (U.S. Department of State).

The examination of the influence of social Darwinism on Progressive Era philosophy also causes us to inspect the motives behind the reform measures of the era. Reform movements commonly associated with benevolence of intention are open for reinterpretation. Not only are the underlying philosophies up for debate, but also ideas commonly associated with particular acts of government. The motives are now up for debate and the consequences of such legislation were assumed during the Progressive Era to be dramatically different than most argue regarding similar policies today. For example, then the minimum wage was assumed to cause unemployment. Compare this to arguments today, as it is often argued that unemployment will not be an appreciable result of a raise in the minimum wage. Additionally, other laws affecting reproductive activity are open to question. Because of the Progressive Darwinist legacy, it may be rightly questioned whether such policies are meant to restrict the procreation of certain members or groups in society. Additionally, many of the policies advocated by Progressive Era

reformers were not implemented until the New Deal Era. Because of the above, many pieces of legislation passed subsequent to the Progressive Era can be perceived in a completely different light and are open to a different scrutiny. This scrutiny is not based upon the arguments of opponents of Progressive legislation, but arguments used at the time by proponents of Progressive legislation when reform was first advocated and implemented.

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